

REMARKS

Claims 1-18 and 21 are all the claims pending in the application. Applicants thank the Examiner for indicating that claims 1-5, 10-18 and 21 are allowed.

Claims 6-9 are rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(b) as being anticipated by Hauer (6,695,344).

Analysis of Rejection based on Hauer

As previously noted by Applicants, Hauer fails to disclose that the alleged central portion 38 is opened by tear lines. In fact, there are no tear lines provided around the central portion because this portion 38 is a completely separate piece from the airbag cover. See FIG. 1 and col. 1, lines 16-49. Surrounding the portion 38 is the reinforcement ring 40 which prevents the portion 38 from moving. Surrounding the reinforcement ring 40 is the ring-shaped part 32. Surrounding the ring-shaped part 32 is the so-called tear line 34, delineating the part 32 from the outer part 30.

“The ring shaped part 32 consists of flaps that are attached in one piece radially on the inside to a middle part 38 of the cover 7...The reinforcement ring 40 is positioned on the outer edge of the middle part 38 and thus extends along the inner edge of the ring-shaped part 32.” (Col. 3, lines 34-44.) Thus, the so-called tear line 34 is formed between the ring 32 and the outer part 30, rather than between the central part 38 and the openable part of the cover.

In order to clarify the position of the tear lines in the present invention, Applicants amend claim 6 to recite that airbag cover includes a plurality of cover pieces, and that the tear lines delineate the central portion from the cover pieces, so that the cover pieces are completely

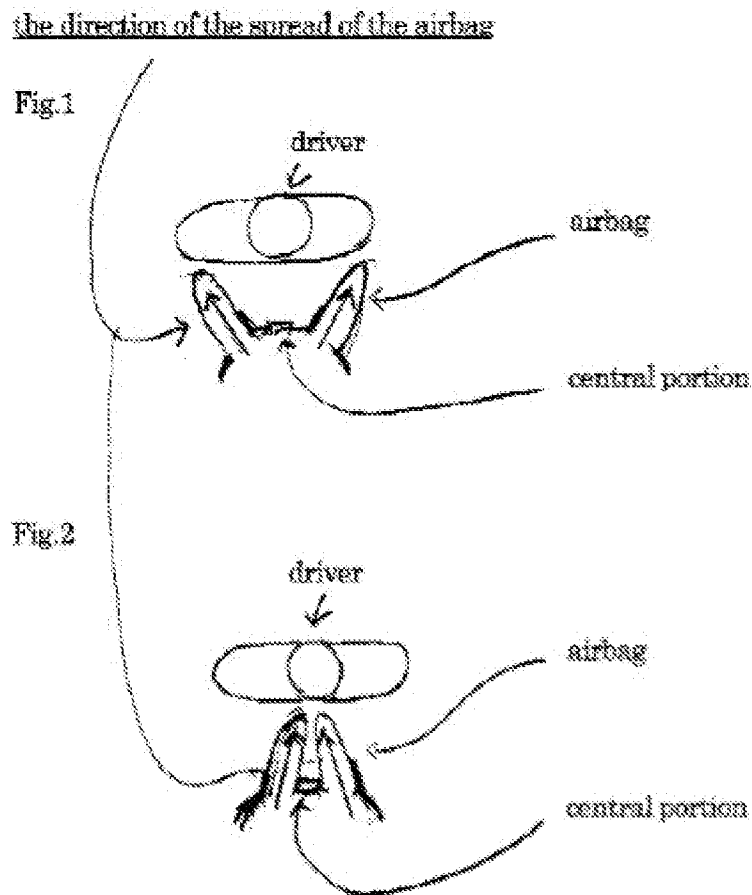
detached from the central portion by the tear lines, so that the cover pieces are pushed outwardly away from the central portion when the tear lines tear.

These changes are intended to clarify the precise location of the tear lines of the invention. In Hauer, the reinforcement ring 40 and the ring-shaped part 32 are not part of the central portion; the tear lines are provided in a different positional relationship than the present invention.

This distinction is important. There is a difference in the direction of the spread of the airbag owing to the positional relationship between the “tear lines” and “cover pieces”, resulting in a difference in the shape of the completely inflated airbag as shown in the sketches below.

In Hauer, when the so-called tear line 34 tears, the ring-shaped part 32 is detached from the outer part 30, and thus the airbag expands, through the ring-shaped outlet opening 30, in a direction oblique to a driver (See Fig. 1 sketch).

In contrast, in the present invention, when the tear lines tear, the cover pieces are detached from the central portion and move outwardly away therefrom, and thus the airbag expands, around the central portion, in a direction straight to a driver (See Fig. 2 sketch).



For at least the foregoing reasons, claim 6 is patentable over Hauer.

Claims 7-9 should be patentable for at least the same reasons as claim 6 by virtue of their dependency therefrom.

Conclusion

In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of this application are now believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

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The USPTO is directed and authorized to charge all required fees, except for the Issue Fee and the Publication Fee, to Deposit Account No. 19-4880. Please also credit any overpayments to said Deposit Account.

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